

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE ~~1A2~~

NEW YORK TIMES  
4 March 1986

## Embassy Row

# Building the One Where Diplomats Place Walls

By BARBARA GAMAREKIAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 3 — The diplomatic game can be played on many levels in this town.

Consider, for example, the new Soviet Embassy compound, now almost finished.

"In many ways it was a microcosm of the cold war," says H. Russell Hanna Jr., who watched the construction and the diplomatic maneuvering from the architectural front lines. "The relationship would go from friendly to cool, from friendly to cool."

As vice president of EDAW, an architectural planning and landscape company in Alexandria, Va., Mr. Hanna has had a rare inside view of things over the 11 years it has taken to complete the compound. The company was initially hired by the General Services Administration to do an environmental impact study for the 10-acre complex on Wisconsin Avenue in Northwest Washington. It was later asked by John Carl Warnecke, American architect for the project, to come on board as a site planner.

At the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Mr. Hanna recalls, construction in the compound halted for more than three months. "Things got very tense," he said. "The U.S. held up building permits. The review process of the District of Columbia took longer. Americans just generally dragged their feet to make things uncomfortable."

The Soviet Union countered, he said, by making access to the construction site much more difficult for American workers. Sometimes, he said, there were 30-minute identification checks at the gate.

And while the work is now all but finished, the Soviet mission must still use its old 16th Street quarters. "They can't get a certificate of occupancy until our embassy is completed in Moscow, which is probably some six months off," Mr. Hanna said. "They were supposed to go up simultaneously, brick by brick."

Augmenting the tension at one point, the Russians protested that a bug had been planted on the site.

"That prompted a whole new construction process," Mr. Hanna said. "Two Soviets had to be present at every concrete pour. You can imagine the headaches."

Who planted the bug, the Russians or the Americans?

The United States denied involvement, according to Mr. Hanna, and accused the Russians of trying to create an incident.

The site on Mount Alto, the city's second highest point, has given the Soviet Union unprecedented advantages in electronic spying, according to American critics.

But matters could have been worse, Mr. Hanna said, under the original Soviet plan. "If their administration building had been built to Soviet specifications," said Mr. Hanna, "they would have had direct visual access to the windows of the White House from their top deck. But when the design, rendered by the chief Moscow architect, Mikhail Posokhin, was worked over by American architects, Mr. Hanna added, it lost a story.

Mr. Hanna dealt directly with the Soviet chief architect rather than embassy officials. "Except when things got tense," he said:

One fairly simple problem, he said, meant extending the Soviet boundary one foot to utilize an existing wall. This ended up being negotiated through the State Department. "It took a 15-person meeting of diplomats," Mr. Hanna said.

For all the problems, Mr. Hanna says he found the Soviet designers

and engineers could be congenial. They would often break out vodka after arduous meetings over disputes.

One day, Mr. Hanna said, the Federal Bureau of Investigation came calling. "They wanted to look at the plan," he said, "and it was obvious they wanted to see what we had developed in way of plantings. Shade trees prevent a camera from focusing on its object, and it's fairly common knowledge that the F.B.I. has rented the top floor of a nearby hotel for surveillance."

The Russians gave a "topping out" party to celebrate the completion of the steel for the tallest residential tower, and Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin, State Department officials and 200 people gathered for speeches and vodka. Suddenly a helicopter appeared and hovered.

"Of course everyone's reaction is to look up, which gives you front face exposure," said Mr. Hanna. "I'm sure that I and everyone else on the site that morning have a file someplace."